

Snow fears overblown, say U.S. skiers Vancouver hosts the world

By MATTHEW LITTLE
Epoch Times Staff

VANCOUVER—With one of the strongest groups of skiers in the Vancouver Olympics, the U.S. team is geared up for gold and not wasting any time thinking about a lack of snow on Cypress Mountain.

"I think the Americans have a really great chance, and I just hope to be a part of that," Shannon Bahrke, the current U.S. freestyle champion, told reporters in Vancouver on Monday. She took silver in Salt Lake City in 2002.

The media has made much of Cypress Mountain's distressing lack of snow after the warmest January on record with video footage showing helicopters hauling the precious white stuff. But when the team was asked if they were concerned, the answer was a resounding no.

"What concerns? There is snow on the course and the snow is going to be really good. The course is going to be awesome and I am sure it is going to be a great event," added freestyle skier Patrick Deneen.

Heather McPhie, who finished second at the World Cup event at Deer Valley, Utah, in January, went on to say that this was par for the course in their sport.

"We'll all be in the same boat. We've



NOT WORRIED: U.S. freestyle skiers Shannon Bahrke and Patrick Deneen told reporters the snow conditions on Cypress were just fine. MATTHEW LITTLE / THE EPOCH TIMES

all gotten really used to all sorts of weather conditions. This is an outdoor sport. We've skied in rain, we've skied in tons of snow, we've skied in hot weather, cold weather, so we're ready for it," she said.

Bahrke said the focus on the issue was more to do with the media's relative ignorance of competition conditions than any danger it posed to the games.

"I think for you guys, you come here to this event and it is so new to you because you see that there is no snow up there and that is really a concern, but us, everywhere we go

is different, everyday can be different. For us, that is just part of the game."

"In Italy, we literally skied on a pile of snow on a dirt hill so this is already an improvement over that and if we lose training days, so do our competitors. So it's just about the last concern we have right now," said Hannah Kearney, the top ranked mogul skier in the world last year.

The U.S. was the first to try the course at Cypress later that day. After taking a run, Kearney confirmed her earlier statement.

"It was great. We had lowered our

expectations after hearing about all the problems with the snow, but it's absolutely fine. The course feels new, but it will get better after more people ski on it."

Later that day, IOC President Jacques Rogge also faced questions about snow conditions on Cypress for the freestyle and snowboard competitions.

He said there was nothing to worry about.

The other members of the U.S. freestyle moguls team are Bryon Wilson, Michelle Roark, Nate Roberts, and Michael Morse.

Former Samsung Chair Suspended from IOC

By MATTHEW LITTLE
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VANCOUVER—The International Olympic Committee has suspended Kun-Hee Lee of South Korea from sitting on any IOC commission for five years and publicly reprimanded the billionaire businessman.

Mark Adams, the IOC's director of communications, said Lee

"tarnished the reputation of the Olympic movement" when announcing the suspension at a press conference in Vancouver on Sunday.

Lee had been suspended for 18 months before Sunday's decision. But the reprimand and suspension came with the news that he would be reinstated as a full member of the IOC, which is seen as a boost to South Korea's long-term efforts to

host the games. It is currently bidding against Germany and France for the 2018 Winter Games.

The former chairman of Samsung Electronics, Lee was embroiled in a scandal over a Samsung slush fund used to bribe influential political and judicial figures in South Korea. He gave up his IOC rights after being indicted for tax evasion in 2008. Last year, however, he

was pardoned by the South Korean government.

During the press conference at the Vancouver Olympics main media centre at Canada Place in downtown Vancouver, a reporter asked how the IOC could combat concerns about corruption while permitting Lee to maintain his membership.

Adams said the reprimand and ban from sitting on any IOC commission were among the toughest measures taken against an IOC member.

'What Canadians really want is gold'

GOLD CONTINUED FROM P1

"We have never been able to do that."

Own the Podium is in part a response to the fact that Canada has never won gold when hosting the Games. In Montreal in 1976 and Calgary in 1988, Canada left like a lonely bridesmaid.

Gary Lunn, Canada's Minister of State for Sport, has promised that the program will continue, no longer subject to the five-year sunset clause that is about to end.

"We are behind our athletes every step of the way," he said.

That attitude, despite denials that future funding will hinge on athletes' accomplishments in the weeks ahead, has in part come about because of the success the program has already shown. If the Games play out at all like the various 2009 world championships in Olympic sports, Canada just might "own" the countries it is competing against. Last year Canada

took 29 medals compared to 28 for the U.S. and 27 for Germany, and that included a U.S. medal in women's ski jumping which is not in this year's Olympics.

Chris Rudge, CEO of the Canadian Olympic Committee, says Canada's Olympians have finally been given the tools to do the job, and he wasn't shy about touting the success of the program.

"We've accomplished in Canada what Australia did in 20 years, in a very short period of time."

This time around, he said, Canadians would not be going into the Games believing someone else's program is better, or that other athletes had more support.

He said Canadian athletes are "as well prepared as anybody.... We've given everything but an excuse."

"Canada will field the strongest Canadian team in our history," announced VANOC's VP Andrea Shaw. VANOC has been careful to poll

Canadians and find out what would make the Games a success in their eyes. While hosting a successful games and making new friends is important, the committee found that what Canadians really want is gold.

With the help of 17 university programs across the country, working out the best clothing, training, and equipment, Canadian athletes will have a better chance to shave off the tenths of a second needed to go from runner up to ruling athlete.

Last time around in Turin, Italy, Germany owned the medal count, taking home 29 medals, 11 of them gold. Canada came in third in the medal count with 24, after America's 25, but tied fifth for gold medals.

When a German reporter at the Tuesday press conference asked Lunn what kind of medal count Canada wanted this time around, he said with a smile: "We want to win more medals than Germany... We just hope we have more medals than you."

With the help of 17 university programs across the country, working out the best clothing, training, and equipment, Canadian athletes will have a better chance to shave off the tenths of a second needed to go from runner up to ruling athlete



GOING FOR GOLD: Gary Lunn, Canada's Minister of State for Sport, told a German reporter at a press conference about Own The Podium on Tuesday that Canada wanted to beat Germany in the medal count. MATTHEW LITTLE / THE EPOCH TIMES

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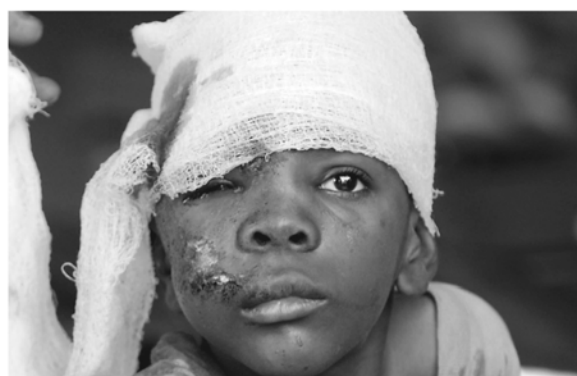
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